

USAID/BANGLADESH'S ANTI-TRAFFICKING PROGRAM: PROGRESS - JULY TO DECEMBER 2000

A. BACKGROUND ON TRAFFICKING IN BANGLADESH

A twelve-year-old girl is tricked into a situation where she is taken away from her family and transported to India. Once there, she is sold to a brothel owner. From this point on, the scenario is very much the same -- she is gang raped and tortured for days until she finally agrees to sleep with up to 10 men a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, for several years. Many eventually acquire an illness that deteriorates their body -- some die for these diseases.

This case provides a typical example of a trafficking situation that happens to countless women and children in South Asia. Every year, more than 1 million women and children worldwide are reportedly trafficked and sold for a variety of different purposes -- many end up in the sex trade. If one were to calculate this number, it comes to nearly 3,000 women and children per day!

In Bangladesh, the problem is very acute. It is estimated that 10-20,000 persons (30 - 50 per day) are trafficked per year to major cities in India, Pakistan and the Middle East. The ages of the women and girls trafficked range from 7 to 24, with a mean age of around 15. As for boys, their age ranges from 4 to 12. Most of the women and girls are trafficked for the sex trade and domestic work, while the boys are recruited to act as camel jockeys and beggars. Once oriented into the sex trade, a girl might find herself forced to service between five and ten clients a day.

There are basically three ways in which persons are trafficked from Bangladesh: 1) he/she is sold by a family member, friend or neighbor; 2) he/she is tricked into going to another country with the promise of a job or a marriage proposal; or 3) he/she is kidnapped and forcefully taken away. Once in the hands of brothel owners and pimps, girls/women are subjected to a tortuous "break in period" that often includes multiple gang rapes, beatings, deprivation of food, and being burned by acid or cigarettes. There is no limit to the abuse one is subjected to in order to ensure that this person complies with the wishes of the house.

The human rights violations associated with the trafficking of persons are staggering. This trade violates nearly every human right, resulting in a form of modern day slavery. Likewise, the public health implications are also significant. Many sex workers are forced to have unprotected sex. Based on studies carried out in Bombay, as many as 65 percent of the sex workers were HIV positive. Many of the victims live in horrible conditions and suffer from a full array of chronic infectious diseases. Girls who manage to escape from the sex trade and return to Bangladesh are often not accepted into their communities -- they are considered "spoiled". In order to survive, they are forced to go underground where they continue selling sex.

In summary, trafficking is a social evil that seems to be growing at an alarming rate throughout the world. This practice results in unimaginable human suffering and represents one of the most important human rights issues of our time.

B. USAID/DHAKA'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM: OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

Beginning in July 2000, USAID/Dhaka put in place an anti-trafficking strategy that is built on five basic pillars, namely:

- Appropriate, targeted **research**;
- Strengthening Bangladesh's anti-trafficking **network** (ATSEC);
- Supporting NGO/CBO **capacity building**;
- **Prosecution** and **protection** (rehabilitation); and
- Developing and implementing appropriate, targeted anti-trafficking **prevention** efforts.

Below is a description of each of these pillars in more detail. Note that an attempt has been made to ensure that each of the activities/components is complementary and support of the others.

- **APPROPRIATE, TARGETED RESEARCH:** USAID/Dhaka's anti-trafficking research program in Bangladesh includes the following: a literature review; a non-government organization (NGO) inventory; mapping exercises to track at-risk areas; a "best practices" assessment; creation of a victim database; a community-level trafficking awareness survey; and market research to develop a nationwide anti-trafficking awareness campaign.
- **STRENGTHENING OF BANGLADESH'S ANTI-TRAFFICKING NETWORK (ATSEC):** USAID/Dhaka is providing support to "Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC)", a national anti-trafficking network, to implement the following: link NGOs and Government entities into a strong partnership; establish a focal point for moving the national anti-trafficking agenda forward; establish a resource center to disseminate data on the subject; and provide technical support to grassroots organizations.
- **SUPPORTING NGO CAPACITY BUILDING:** Many NGOs working on the trafficking issue require technical support to help them to build up their capacity to implement and monitor their programs. USAID/Dhaka is funding on-site coaching; workshops and seminars to improve skills; joint monitoring of field activities to share lessons learned; and exercises that focus on identifying "best practices".
- **PROSECUTION AND PROTECTION (REHABILITATION):** USAID/Dhaka is funding the Bangladesh National Women's Lawyer's Association (BNWLA), one

of the most prominent of the NGOs focusing on trafficking, to address both protection and prosecution related activities. BNWLA will assist in providing trafficking victims with legal aid, rehabilitation, and repatriation support services. BNWLA will also use a portion of this funding to provide assistance to the Government of Bangladesh to prosecute traffickers.

- **DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING APPROPRIATE, TARGETED ANTI-TRAFFICKING PREVENTION EFFORTS:** USAID/Dhaka is providing funding to ATSEC to develop culturally sensitive prevention and awareness messages that will reach the community level. The program will: development and test materials for a national campaign (all media); roll out this campaign; conduct awareness raising workshops/meetings (all levels); launching of school programs; establish a mobile campaign; and launch a border campaign.

To implement the program, funding was provided to the following organizations/individuals:

- Two agreements to “Save the Children Denmark” to act as an umbrella for “Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC)”, a network that includes 14 core groups working on the trafficking issue;
- One agreement with Bangladesh National Women’s Lawyer’s Association (BNWLA);
- One agreement with the International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh to complete a literature review; and
- One purchase order to Therese Blanchet to carry out a long-term trafficking community-based survey; and

B. PROGRESS TO DATE: (JULY TO MAY 2001)

Between November 2000 and May 2001, the following progress has been made within USAID/Dhaka’s anti-trafficking program:

Research

- A comprehensive literature review for the trafficking sector was drafted by ICDDR,B;
- An inventory of non-government organizations (NGO) working on trafficking activities was prepared. A total of 130 organizations were included;
- A comprehensive “victim” database was created. This database tracks information on all trafficking or attempted trafficking cases that are known to ATSEC and BNWLA;
- A 13-month community-level trafficking awareness survey has been started beginning December 2000.

Networking

- ATSEC/Bangladesh established a focal office and resource center to collect, track and disseminate information on trafficking; and
- Technical support was provided to 11 grassroot organizations.

Capacity Building

- A total of 5 on-site coaching visits have taken place to help improve the capacity of anti-trafficking groups;
- A total of 4 workshops and seminars have been carried out to improve management and reporting skills related to the anti-trafficking sector; and
- Four joint monitoring of field activities with USAID/Dhaka and ATSEC members have been carried out.

Prosecution and Protection

- Ten focal sites have been set up in different districts to regularly collect “legal” information on trafficking cases;
- Using the ten offices:
 - 12 trafficking cases have been investigated and filed;
 - 20 traffickers have been arrested;
 - 86 incidents related to trafficking have been detailed;
- A total of 25 external trafficking victims have been repatriated from different countries;
- A total of 10 internal trafficking victims have been released;
- A database has been developed to track all of the legal support being provided by BNWLA; and
- A total of 35 persons (25 external and 10 internal trafficking victims) have received counseling support to assist in their rehabilitation.

Prevention Efforts

- Work on the “request for proposal” was completed for a national anti-trafficking design effort.